

# In Adam or In Christ?

On 11 May 2000 a lady found a new e-mail message on her computer, which simply said, "I love you". It looked innocent enough, perhaps even romantic. Like most of us would, she clicked to open the message, and the so-called "Love Bug" was born. With lightning speed it raced around the world, bringing politics and business to a halt. It was a deadly computer virus that caused millions of computers to crash. One virus, but so much contamination. But it's not the first time that a single virus has caused so much grief to mankind. A much deadlier virus hit Planet Earth at the beginning, polluting the first human couple, Adam and Eve. Despite God's warning not to click on to Satan's message, they did so with appalling consequences for them, and through them to all mankind. That virus is called "Sin".

We live in a messed-up world. No one would argue with that. The Bible gives us a clear reason why: **"through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned."** Adam messed everything up, and we've succeeded at keeping it in that condition.

Donald Grey Barnhouse -- No doctrine of the Bible is as easy to prove as the doctrine of original sin. ... Men hate the doctrine of original sin and seek to deny its existence, but it still stands. They substitute the theory of ascent for the doctrine of descent, but the fall still confronts them. Even if they could sweep away the indestructible revelation of God, their very deeds expose man's sinfulness. And if men deny the evidence of their senses, their own hearts proclaim kinship to death, which envelops all the race. Apart from the doctrine of the Fall, there is no explanation for the course of human history. If the first three chapters of Genesis were destroyed, the facts of history would demand that they be rewritten to account for all that has followed since the day when man turned away from God and lost the image in which he was created. Our text stands secure: By one man sin entered. (Romans, III, p. 29)

When God looks at the over 7 billion people who live on planet earth—and the other billions who lived here in the past—he sees two people who stand out from all the rest of humanity. They are representative men. The whole history of the human race revolves around those two men—what they did and what flowed from what they did.

One man is Adam; the other man is Jesus Christ. Adam did something in the Garden of Eden; Jesus did something when he died on the cross. Because Adam sinned in the Garden, a vast result has come upon the human race. We live today in the continuing consequences of what Adam did in the early mists of recorded history.

On the other side is Jesus Christ. When he died on the cross and rose from the dead, something happened that not only counteracted what Adam did in the Garden, it far exceeded it by its grace and glory. The course of the world was changed at Calvary and we live today in a changed world because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ 2000 years ago.

Paul shows this clearly in Romans 5. Although today we will only be able to study in detail verses 12-14, I will read verses 12-21 so you can get the flow of the passage.

## Romans 5:12-21

**12 Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned--**

**13 (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law.**

- 14 Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.**
- 15 But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many.**
- 16 And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification.**
- 17 For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.)**
- 18 Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.**
- 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.**
- 20 Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more,**
- 21 so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.**

Two men, two deeds, two moments in time, with two vast results flowing across the generations, affecting us to this very day. Today you are either “in Adam” or “in Christ.” You are either under condemnation because you are in Adam or you’re justified because you are in Jesus Christ.

First, Paul explains what happened to the human race through Adam:

### **1. Those who are in Adam are under the reign of death (5:12-14).**

In these first three verses Paul sets out to establish two very important connections. The first link is that between Adam and all mankind. The second is between Adam and Jesus Christ. Serving as our representative, Adam sinned, and his sin and death that came from it was applied to every person who has ever lived or will ever live.

Paul writes that sin and death entered the world “**through one man**” and “**spread to all men**.” Twelve times in 5:12-19 Paul uses the word “one.” He uses this word repeatedly to refer to Adam<sup>11</sup> and his sin and Jesus Christ and His work (cf. 1 Cor 15:22; 45-49). Paul also uses the word “all” eight times in this section. Both of these key words provide comparisons and contrasts throughout this section.

### **A. Sin and death entered the world through Adam**

In Genesis we learn that God created Adam and Eve as the first humans. He placed them in the Garden of Eden, and gave them a strict commandment not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God had warned Adam that in the day he ate of that fruit, he would die (Gen. 2:17). This referred both to physical death and to spiritual death, or spiritual separation from God. We know the rest of the story. The Serpent tempted Eve, she ate. She gave some to Adam who was with her, and he ate.

At the moment Adam and Eve ate the fruit, they were estranged from God, separated from the life of God and fellowship with Him. And on the day they sinned the effects of physical aging and death were set into motion.

Why Adam? Why not Eve? Didn't she eat of the forbidden fruit first? Yes, Eve did eat from the tree first. However, Adam's role and position was different. He was the head of the human race. Eve was deceived by the serpent. Adam was not deceived but sinned knowingly, blatantly, defiantly rebelling against God. Eve is embodied in the sin of Adam. Adam was the head of the race, the first one created, and Eve was taken from his side, when that one man sinned, sin entered into the human race. Then Paul says, **"and death through sin."**

When you die, the coroner will fill out a death certificate for you. There's a space on that certificate that says "Cause of Death." If we understand the Bible, the answer is always the same: "Sin." Not sickness, not cancer, not an accident, not old age. Those are merely symptoms of the one great cause of death: SIN.

So both physical and spiritual death entered into this world through Adam's original sin.

What does this have to do with us? Everything!

### **B. In Adam all sinned.**

The end of verse 12 says, **"Because all sinned."** Death spread to all men because all sinned. That's in the past tense—"All sinned." It is not "All do sin" not is it "All are sinners" (although we have already seen from Romans 1-3 that is both of these are true). The past tense is crucial for understanding Paul's point. Paul is pointing back to some event in the past when "all sinned."

When did we all sin? I think the best view in light of the context is that Paul is saying, "When Adam sinned, we all sinned." This verse is pushing you and me back to the Garden of Eden, back to that fateful moment when Adam ate the forbidden fruit. In some mysterious way, you were there and I was there. When Adam sinned, you sinned with him and so did I.

You may say, "How can that be? I wasn't there in the Garden, how could I sin in Adam or with Adam or through Adam?"

When Adam was created, he stood as the divinely appointed representative for the whole human race. What happened to him happened to all of us because in God's eyes he was appointed to act in the place of everyone who would later come after him. In other words, Adam was the representative head of the human race. His sin involved the entire human race in sin. Adam was not just acting as *a man*, he was acting as *mankind*. His sin was imputed or charged to everyone born after him. Because of Adam's sin, each of us was born guilty of sin before we ever committed our first willful sin. We are not sinners because we sin; we sin because we are sinners by virtue of our union with Adam.

But not only does Adam represent us as the head of the human race, we were also literally with him in the Garden because you were present in his seed. You were seminally present in Adam because he is the father of all humanity. All of us trace our lineage ultimately back to this one man. He and Eve are the progenitors—the founders—of the human race. When Adam sinned, the sin principle, the corrupt decaying sin nature entered into the human stream.

Children are not born good. They are not even born neutral. All of us are born sinners. When Adam sinned, he tainted the human bloodstream. The virus of sin entered the

human bloodstream, and as a result, every baby born into this world is tainted with the deadly sin virus.

So when Adam sinned, he represented us and we were truly present in him because we are directly descended from him. So in Adam, all sinned.

The proof of this fact is the reality and universality of death.

### **C. Because of sin, death reigns.**

Paul began verse 12 with a comparison (“**just as**”), but then breaks off in mid-sentence to explain or prove (“for”) his comment, “**because all sinned.**” Paul is arguing that the fact of universal death from the time of Adam until Moses was not due to their individual sins, which were not imputed to them because they were not breaking the specific commands of the law, but rather due to their identification with Adam in his original sin.

Verse 14 says that death reigned from Adam to Moses. What does that mean? It means that even before God gave the Ten Commandments, men sinned and they died. Men died because they were sinners even without the Law. Romans 5:14 says they sinned even though they never broke a specific command like Adam did. Sin was in the world before the law. The presence of death before Sinai proves that fact. Death reigned in the earliest generations of world history.

Those who lived between Adam and Moses still sinned. Verse 13 says, “**For until the law sin was in the world.**” We see it in Cain murdering Abel. We see it especially in the flood. The wickedness of the human race was so pervasive that all but eight people died by God’s judgment. But verse 13 says that “**sin is not imputed when there is no law.**” So, if their guilt wasn’t imputed, why did they all die? Answer: they died because Adam’s sin was imputed to them. They sinned when he sinned. The proof that they sinned in Adam is that they all died.

You can see it clearly in Genesis 5—the first great genealogy in the Bible. It gives us the generations from Adam to Noah, each one ending in the same refrain “**And he died.**” Some have called it the death chapter. Death reigned.

But death still reigns today. If there is one thing about which we may be perfectly certain it is this: Unless the Lord comes first, you are going to die someday. How certain is the fact of your death? So certain that there is an entire industry built about the expectation of your death. It’s called the life insurance industry. The only reason you buy life insurance is because someday you are going to die. If you lived forever, you’d never need life insurance. Life insurance is based on one great theological truth: Death reigns.

The common reaction to this is, “That’s not fair!” Why should I die because of Adam’s sin? Do you really think that you would have done better than Adam? Do you think that you would have resisted temptation and lived a sinless life if you had been born without the effects and guilt of Adam’s sin? Not likely!

It started with Adam but it didn’t end there. It continues in your life and in mine. Adam was the first sinner but he wasn’t the last. We follow in the footsteps of our forefather because we share his tainted blood. Was it fair?

Warren Wiersbe has a great perspective on that question,

Skeptics sometimes ask, “Was it fair for God to condemn the whole world just because of one man’s disobedience?” The answer, of course, is that it was not only fair; but it was also wise and gracious. To begin with, if God had tested each human being individually, the result would have been the same: disobedience. But even more important, by condemning the human race through one man

(Adam), God was then able to save the human race through one Man (Jesus Christ)! Each of us is racially united to Adam, so that his deed affects us. But because you and I were lost in Adam, our racial head, we can be saved in Christ, the Head of the new creation. God's plan was both gracious and wise.

## 2. Adam is a type of Christ.

That is going to be Paul's whole point in this passage, Romans 5:12-21. At the end of Verse 14 Paul says, "**Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come.**" Adam, the first man, is a type or pattern or foreshadowing of Jesus Christ. Paul goes about displaying the greatness of Christ's work by lining it up beside the work of Adam, the first man, and pointing out the similarities and differences.

Paul has shown in verses 12-14 that we all sinned in Adam, that his sin is imputed to us, and that universal human death and condemnation is God's judgment and penalty on all of us because we were deeply and mysteriously united to Adam in when he sinned.

Why does this matter? Doesn't Romans teach in 3:23 that "**all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**" individually? And doesn't Romans 6:23 teach that the "**wages of sin is death**"? And so if our judgment and condemnation are what our own individual sins deserve, why does it matter that our sin and death is caused by our union with Adam in his sin?

The parallel Paul wants us to see and rejoice in is that just as Adam's sin is imputed to us because we were in him, so Christ's righteousness is imputed to us when we are in Him.

Paul makes this comparison clear in verse 18, "**Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life.**"

In Adam we all were condemned; in Christ we all are justified. Adam's transgression was imputed to us; and Christ's righteousness is imputed to us.

John Piper writes about why this is so important,

What's at stake here is the whole comparison between Christ and Adam. If we don't understand "**because all sinned**" as "*because all sinned in Adam*," the entire comparison between Christ and Adam will be distorted and we won't see the greatness of justification by grace through faith for what it really is. ...

If you say, "Through one man sin and death entered the world and death spread to everybody because all sinned individually," then the comparison with the work of Jesus could be, "So also through one man, Jesus Christ, righteousness and life entered the world and life spread to all because all individually did acts of righteousness." In other words, justification would not be God's imputing Christ's righteousness to us, but our performing individual acts of righteousness with Christ's help and then being counted righteous on that basis. ...

But of course that is the opposite of what Paul has been teaching about justification by faith. Piper goes on to show the implications of all of us sinning in Adam:

if we take the words, "because all sinned" to mean "because all sinned in Adam"? Then it would go like this: "Just as through one man sin and death entered the world and death spread to everybody because all sinned in Adam and his sin was imputed to them, so also through one man Jesus Christ,

righteousness entered the world and life through righteousness, and life spread to all who are in Christ because his righteousness is imputed to them."

In Romans 5:10-11 Paul had said that it was through the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ that we have been saved and reconciled to God. How could God impute one man's righteousness to all those in Christ? Because it was the wondrous and abundant grace of God reversing the consequences of one man's sin. Adam's sin was imputed to all who are in Adam. Just so, Christ's righteousness is imputed to those who are in Christ.

Again Piper writes,

That is the all-important parallel. The deepest reason why death reigns over all is not because of our individual sins, but because of Adam's sin imputed to us. So the deepest reason eternal life reigns is not because of our individual deeds of righteousness, but because of Christ's righteousness imputed to us by grace through faith.

So the whole message comes down to one simple question: Have you ever accepted God's free gift of salvation that comes through the one man, Jesus Christ? Have you ever reached out the empty hands of faith and said, "Yes, Lord Jesus, I open my heart to you and ask you to forgive me of all my sins." Have you ever done that?

The choice is yours. Yes, you were there in Adam, and you sinned and you'll die. But you can also be there in Christ with the payment of your sins made in His death and you can rise in His resurrection to newness of life. Which will you choose?